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Update on UNHCR’s operations in Asia and the Pacific - 2010

This update presents some examples of challenges, progress and developments in the region since the last strategic overview presented to the 47th meeting of the Standing Committee in March 2010. A more comprehensive report will be provided in the forthcoming Global Appeal 2011 Update.

A. Major challenges and new developments

Following the displacement of an estimated 300,000 people inside southern **Kyrgyzstan** in June 2010, in addition to some 75,000 who fled across the border into **Uzbekistan**, UNHCR airlifted emergency relief items and sent emergency teams into both countries. The emergency relief operation then suddenly had to switch from an initially anticipated refugee operation to one characterized by mass returns and the need for early recovery. The Office continues to work closely with the UN country team and to support the Uzbek Government with contingency planning. In Kyrgyzstan, while the majority of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) have returned to their places of origin, some 75,000 remain displaced, and many are still without appropriate shelter owing to a lack of adequate security in their areas of return. UNHCR, as the shelter and protection cluster lead, is helping with the implementation of an emergency shelter programme, as well as transitional shelters. Protection activities include restoration of personal identity, civil status and property documents, as well as free legal counseling.

In the wake of the devastating floods in **Pakistan** in August, UNHCR is working closely with the Government and the humanitarian community to respond quickly to the emergency, notwithstanding ongoing security challenges. The Office is providing emergency assistance to some 2.7 million of the flood-affected populations including many who are refugees. Some 1.5 million out of the total 1.7 million registered Afghans reside in the flood-affected areas.

UNHCR welcomes the “Repatriation and Management Strategy for Afghan Refugees in Pakistan,” adopted by the Government of Pakistan in March 2010, and supports the new focus on managing the protracted refugee situation. The Strategy comprises the extension of the Tripartite Agreement and the Proof of Registration (POR) card for 1.7 million Afghan refugees until the end of 2012, and a population profiling exercise for the Afghan population, with an emphasis on protection. UNHCR is supporting the Government in issuing new cards to unregistered family members and providing approximately 1 million birth certificates to registered Afghan children.

Following a request from the Government of the **Philippines**, relayed by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, UNHCR has assumed its IDP protection responsibilities in the response to the situation in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. UNHCR will support the Government in shaping a strategy aimed at addressing protection gaps faced by the IDPs. To deliver on its commitment, UNHCR has established a presence in Mindanao through the opening of an office in Cotabato, and in July 2010 undertook an inter-agency mission with

the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to better define the scope of its activities.

Since the end of the armed conflict in **Sri Lanka** in May 2009, UNHCR has been assisting the Government with the voluntary return of IDPs, including by supporting the Government in its demining efforts, undertaking protection monitoring and providing basic essential supplies to ensure the sustainable return of IDPs. Of the original 270,000 people displaced at the end of the conflict, only 35,000 IDPs remained in camps by the end of August 2010. During 2010, UNHCR has established strong collaboration with development actors, aiming to ensure a smooth transition from the post-conflict humanitarian phase to early recovery and development. Progressive phase-down of UNHCR's IDP operation in Sri Lanka depends on the success of the peace and reconciliation process and the extent to which durable solutions for all persons of concern can be identified.

B. Progress on strategic priorities

(i) Ensuring international standards of protection are met for all persons of concern

In the **Islamic Republic of Iran**, UNHCR is engaged in bringing together a “core group” of donor countries and the UN country team with a view to coordinating funding initiatives in support of the Government's ongoing efforts to assist refugees. This may include a programme to provide development assistance to refugee-hosting communities similar to the Refugee Affected and Hosting Areas initiative in Pakistan. UNHCR welcomes the Comprehensive Regulation Plan for foreign nationals recently announced by the Government, which includes Afghans residing in the country. The Office is ready to provide the necessary support to the Government's migration management efforts, with the aim of encouraging the development of policies which facilitate population movements within the region and respect for asylum.

UNHCR continues to advocate with the Government of **Sri Lanka** to ensure that IDP returns take place in conditions of safety and dignity, to areas that have been properly cleared of mines and where humanitarian agencies have access. Although there have been significant improvements, UNHCR continues to advocate for adequate preparations for return movements to avoid IDPs becoming stranded in transit, as well as for those who will not be able to return in the immediate future due to ongoing mine clearance.. Furthermore, UNHCR and other humanitarian actors continue to call for services in the remaining camps to be maintained to ensure that appropriate conditions remain in place for the IDPs.

UNHCR has made significant progress in implementing the new urban refugee policy in **India**, including new systems for the efficient processing of asylum-seekers; targeted assistance for people with specific needs; and the development of mechanisms to strengthen the self-reliance of the refugee population. Durable solutions continued to be pursued for specific groups, particularly through the acquisition of Indian citizenship for Hindu and Sikh Afghan refugees, and to a lesser degree through resettlement.

UNHCR continues to make efforts to engage with the **Lao People's Democratic Republic** with respect to the Lao Hmong who were returned to the country in December 2009.

UNHCR remains concerned about the lack of a common understanding of the Provincial Admission Board (PAB) criteria and procedure across different regions in **Thailand**. The Office will continue to work with the Thai authorities to help the different regional authorities agree on PAB criteria that would allow a credible and functioning screening process. UNHCR welcomes the policy agreement reached with the Royal Thai Government stipulating that all children born in camps on Thai territory are entitled to a birth certificate, and is working with the Government to overcome technical obstacles to the implementation of the policy.

(ii) Affirming and developing an international protection regime

Solutions have been found for the Sri Lankan asylum-seekers on the two boats which were intercepted in **Indonesian** waters in October 2009. Those on the “Oceanic Viking” are in the process of being resettled, and those in the boat in Merak have been accommodated in Tanjung Penang and registered by UNHCR. The Office is currently undertaking refugee

status determination, as per the regular procedure in place in Indonesia. The incidents have highlighted challenges posed by secondary movements in the region and the urgent need to provide better protection options and develop a broader regional cooperation framework.

UNHCR is promoting comprehensive regional approaches to protection including: addressing the root causes of displacement in countries of origin; improving conditions of stay in countries of asylum; and finding durable solutions. The recent **Bali Process** meeting, co-chaired by Australia and Indonesia, provided the opportunity for UNHCR to put forward refugee protection issues as an important element of this regional consultative process. Cooperation with civil society representatives and countries belonging to the Association of South-East Asian Nations (**ASEAN**) paved the way for consultations in 2010 on access to asylum and refugee protection, and access to basic services, particularly in the context of broader migration movements. UNHCR is also exploring areas of collaboration with the recently established ASEAN Inter-governmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), including on refugee protection and statelessness. UNHCR hopes that AICHR will serve as an overarching framework for enhancing refugee protection and resolving statelessness issues in South-East Asia.

UNHCR and the Government of the **Republic of Korea** co-chaired the first sub-regional round table on alternatives to detention, in Seoul in April 2010, during which Government and NGO partners from the region, as well as international experts from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, discussed how to adapt good practices in the sub-region. In this connection, UNHCR welcomes the establishment of the Detention Monitoring Committee by the Immigration Bureau of Japan.

In **Central Asia**, UNHCR continues to advocate for improved national asylum systems; promote accession to Statelessness Conventions and engage governments to prevent and resolve statelessness; and encourage a 10-Point Plan of Action approach as a means of facilitating access to asylum in the mixed migration context. A regional conference on the 10-Point Plan will be held in Kazakhstan in November.

(iii) **Attaining durable solutions**

Following the resumption of voluntary repatriation from Pakistan in March (which had been temporarily halted owing to security concerns), more than 100,000 refugees have returned voluntarily to **Afghanistan** from Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. This surge in repatriation numbers as compared to last year's total (some 54,500) may be attributed to the backlog from last year and perceived improvements in terms of security and livelihood opportunities in some parts of the country (according to returnee monitoring reports). The recent flooding may also be having an impact on repatriation trends as several refugee villages have been badly affected by the rains.

In **Afghanistan**, in spite of the overall deterioration of the security situation throughout the country since the beginning of 2007, UNHCR has continued to refine and implement measures to ensure access through community outreach through partners, increased involvement of local actors, and early planning. The operation continues to focus on voluntary return and reintegration.

It is anticipated that the number of Sri Lankan refugees returning home from India and elsewhere will increase. In the first half of the year, some 850 refugees repatriated from India with UNHCR's help (compared to 820 for all of 2009) and a further 1,000 refugees returned of their own accord. The number of returns is expected to rise sharply in 2011, requiring a reorientation of the operation in **Sri Lanka** towards voluntary repatriation.

In **Bangladesh**, a comprehensive profiling of all refugees in the camps has been undertaken to identify those with specific needs, as well as individual educational qualifications and skills, in order to better focus self-reliance opportunities and identify those in need of resettlement. In parallel, the United Nations joint initiative to combat poverty in the refugee-hosting districts in Bangladesh was launched in February with an overall budget of USD 33 million. In addition to this initiative, under the leadership of UNICEF, UNHCR has recently rehabilitated six local schools near the two camps, south-east of Cox's Bazar.

UNHCR continues to work closely with the Government of **Nepal** and the Core Group of resettlement countries to implement comprehensive durable solutions for refugees from Bhutan in Nepal. Some 56,000 members of the current population of 77,800 in the camps have declared their interest in resettlement. To date, over 34,000 individuals have already been resettled. In parallel, through the recently developed “Community-Based Development Programme,” the Office plans to engage the UN country team, donors, and the Nepalese authorities in the rehabilitation and development of those communities which have been impacted by the long-term presence of the refugees.

Viet Nam took a ground-breaking step towards closing the last chapter in a 35-year-long statelessness situation for some 2,300 Cambodian refugees. In July, naturalization certificates were granted to 287 former Cambodian refugees who were stateless. UNHCR has been working closely with the Government to find a durable solution for the remaining population, who have been living and/or registered in four refugee camps set up by UNHCR in the early 1980s. It is expected that the majority will receive Vietnamese naturalization certificates before the end of the year.

UNHCR welcomes the start of **Japan**’s pilot resettlement programme, with the arrival from Thailand of the first group of refugees from Myanmar in September 2010. In accordance with its global strategic objectives related to resettlement, UNHCR continues to advocate for programmes which take into account protection needs and geographical balance.

C. Financial information

The 2010 ExCom-approved budget of USD 470.8 million was revised upwards to USD 553 million by the middle of August, mainly due to the establishment of supplementary budgets for emergency response to the population displacements caused by the Kyrgyzstan crisis and the Pakistan floods. The majority of prioritized activities have been well funded by earmarked contributions received at the country, sub-regional or regional levels, and implementation throughout the region is on track, with full implementation expected by the end of the year. However, IDP operations in Sri Lanka and Kyrgyzstan, under Pillar IV, require timely additional earmarked contributions in order not to avoid disrupting ongoing activities to facilitate the return and reintegration of IDPs.
